



Mindanao PeaceWeavers

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MINDANAO PEACEWEAVERS
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BASILAN: OF TRAGEDY AND HOPE

Basilan today poses the biggest threat to the GRP-MILF ceasefire agreement since it was redeclared in July 2003. The decapitation of the dead bodies of the Marines and an Imam last July 10 deserves the strongest condemnation of all peace loving peoples. The implications of even one such dastardly act spells the difference between war and peace not only in Basilan but all over Mindanao.

The July 10 incident was clearly a ceasefire-related violation and falls within the jurisdiction and mandate of the Joint Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (JCCCH) and the Malaysian led International Monitoring Team (IMT). We appreciate the caution expressed by the AFP that it will continue to observe the primacy of the peace process even as we appeal to our people and leaders to exercise restraint and sobriety amidst the madness of the situation.

To help normalize the situation in Basilan, we should allow the JCCCH and IMT to respond to the crisis and exhaust all means possible to bring the cowardly perpetrators to justice. We urge the AFP to cooperate with the ceasefire mechanisms and refrain from taking emotional punitive and retaliatory acts that could only harm innocent civilians. The Marines have been a proud professional unit of the AFP and this sad incident will test the mettle of their character. We call on the MILF to likewise continue avoiding further acts of provocation. Because of this carnage, there are already 4,915 persons who have evacuated turning three barangays into virtual ghost communities.

We also seriously note the absence of the International Monitoring Team in Basilan just because the area is not included in their Terms of Reference. Therefore, we recommend and appeal to the Malaysian government as facilitator of the GRP-MILF peace talks to immediately dispatch its IMT members to the area to help deescalate the violence and pacify the warring parties despite the technicality of the TOR. This is imperative in order to save lives and preserve the gains of the GRP-MILF peace talks. Moreover, we ask the Joint-CCCH to establish a permanent monitoring presence in the affected areas to prevent this unfortunate incident from happening again.

For over five years now, Basilan was relatively quiet and peaceful. We cannot but agree fully with the former AFP brigade commander of the island Maj. Gen. Raymundo Ferrer who said that "peace is so fragile and so structures and mechanisms have to be built while we work through peoples minds (by clarifying perceptions) and hearts (by healing the hurts. I see this as a challenge to strengthen local peace formations and coordination between GRP and MILF."

The Basilan incident, while lamentable, can thus be the spark not only to strengthen existing mechanisms and formations for peace, but to explore, create and build conditions to further expand the gains of the peace process until it is consolidated enough to withstand attacks and machinations of rogue elements, spoilers and catastrophes such as this.

We join our perennially hopeful people this path and tireless quest.

The July 10 carnage was a tragic event. But we should not allow it to further sow carnage and chaos and make all the efforts we have built for peace and reconciliation go to waste.

That will be more tragic.

Convenors: Agong Network, Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society, Mindanao Peace Advocates Conference, Mindanao Peoples Caucus, Mindanao Peoples Peace Movement, Mindanao Solidarity Network, Peace Advocates Zamboanga, Sindaw Ko Kalilintad